

South Bay Community Church
Sermon Reflections
Thy Kingdom Come
8 January 2023
Lead Pastor Rev. Tammy Long

Scripture Text: Matthew 6:10

Sermon Preamble

Last week we started our mini-series, “Thy Kingdom Come,” to look at the Lord’s Prayer with fresh eyes. The prayer Jesus taught us has been said, sung, and prayed by millions of people, over thousands of years, all around the world, in multiple languages, from various ethnicities, ages, and social circumstances. Let us look at the Lord’s Prayer with fresh eyes, as a new prayer for a new year. When we focus our hearts and minds on the words to pray the words, not just say them, the Lord’s Prayer is a model prayer we can say verbatim. The Lord’s Prayer is a powerful and encompassing prayer that covers everything we want to share with God through prayer: honoring and affirming God’s holiness, sharing our personal needs, and remembering the needs of others. We can focus with our entire beings of body, mind, and spirit, with the spiritual practice of a body prayer. You are invited to view the video of this message on our church website for the particulars of this body prayer. In this message, we focus on two related petitions Jesus teaches us to pray in Matthew 6:10: For God’s Kingdom to come, and For God’s Will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The “Your Kingdom Come” idea can be difficult for us

The “Kingdom of God” is a Christian term we say a lot. For example, we say we are: building the Kingdom of God, serving the Kingdom of God, advancing the Kingdom of God, representing the Kingdom of God. We may find it challenging to truly explain the Kingdom of God. Where is it? What is it? How does this Kingdom work, exactly? Even the idea of a kingdom can be difficult to grasp.

The idea of a Sovereign is unfamiliar to us and not very helpful when we think of the Kingdom of God. We live in a democracy, so we are used to electing officials to run the country. We expect to have a voice and role in the decision-making process. We see it as a fundamental right, and we can resent anyone telling us what to do, because it is infringing on our freedom. Even in countries like the United Kingdom with a monarchy, the monarchy co-rules with a parliament, a prime minister, and a constitution.

The term “Kingdom” can bring fairy tale thoughts of medieval knights, territorial kings, castles, and dragons. These thoughts are not helpful when contemplating the Kingdom of God because it takes us down a path of once upon a time and happily ever after is not real.

Even the word, kingdom, conjures up images for us. So what do we really mean when we say the Kingdom of God?

The Good News of the Kingdom of God is the everlasting core message of Jesus

For many people, love was the primary message of Jesus while he was on earth. Loving one another, loving God, and loving your enemies is commonly thought to be the primary message of Jesus. Jesus said that loving God and loving our neighbor were the two greatest commandments, but that is only part of the story. Jesus had a bigger, more encompassing message.

Jesus preached the good news that the Kingdom of God is near! “Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached the Good News. ‘The time promised by God has come at last!’ he announced. ‘The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!’” (Mark 1:14).

The phrase “Kingdom of God” is prominent in the New Testament, appearing 53 times, almost always from the mouth of Jesus. Matthew used the phrase, “Kingdom of Heaven,” appearing 32 times,

which is the same phrase in the original languages and means exactly the same thing. The Kingdom of God was the priority message and focus of Jesus' ministry.

Throughout the gospel accounts, Jesus is consistently talking about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus used parables to explain what the Kingdom of God is like.

Jesus compared the Kingdom to yeast and a mustard seed. From small beginnings, quietly and unnoticed, the Kingdom of God will have great growth and influence (Matthew 13:31-33).

Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a treasure and a pearl. It is so valuable that it is worth all we have to find it; it is that precious (Matthew 13:44-47).

Jesus likened the Kingdom of God to a king who gave a banquet. The banquet invitation to the elite and the expected guests was refused. Then the King gave an open invitation to everyone. All are welcome in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 22:2).

Jesus even declared his purpose and mission in light of the Kingdom of God. "Jesus said, 'I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns too, because that is why I was sent'" (Luke 4:43).

Because the good news of the Kingdom of God was Jesus' core message, the Kingdom of God is prominent and a priority in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples and us. But what does it mean? What and where is this Kingdom?

The Kingdom of God means the reign, rule, and sovereignty of God, not a place

When we hear the word kingdom, we think of a place where a king reigns. However, whenever Jesus used "Kingdom of God" it was not about a place. The Greek term translated as kingdom means reign or rule. So the Kingdom of God is about authority; it is not a place. The Kingdom of God is not heaven with streets of gold in the great by and by. Rather, the Kingdom of God is the non-material realm of the reign, rule, and sovereignty of God. When Jesus says the Kingdom of God has come near, Jesus is not saying a place is coming, but rather God's power and authority has arrived. A paraphrase of Mark 1:15 reads, "God's reign is at hand. God's power is being unleashed. Turn your life around and put your trust in the good news."

The original Jewish hearers were familiar with the reign of God. They recognized that God reigned as King over the world God created. God's Kingdom Reign was a theme all through the Old Testament. God announced Kingdom Reign in his covenant with Abraham, and the prophets looked forward to God's unchallenged reign in the age to come. They were looking for God to restore Israel, expecting that when the messiah arrived, God would begin a physical reign on earth.

When Jesus announced the Kingdom of God was near, he had a different vision. From the initial rebellion of Satan in heaven and Adam and Eve on earth, God's intent was always to restore heaven and earth under the reign of God. This reign was not just for Israel; God told Abraham all nations would be blessed through him. God's intent was and is to reestablish a universe where God's name is glorified and God's justice and peace will rule forever.

The Kingdom of God also means the sovereignty of God. What does sovereignty really mean?

The Sovereignty of God is from power to love and nurture with freedom inaugurated by Jesus

The sovereignty of God acknowledges God's rule and reign in our lives. Sovereignty of God affirms God's true power. God's power is not the same as a dictator that threatens our freedom. God's true power freely loves, enables, and nurtures. As our King, God saturates us with God's love for our good without reservations or conditions. God's love is totally free. Under God's care, we are totally free, as God's rule and reign is freedom, not bondage. God's sovereignty as King secures our freedom; it does not threaten our freedom. That is why Jesus says, who the Son sets free is free indeed. True freedom is only found in the Kingdom of God under God's loving authority, rule, and reign through the Son, Jesus.

Since the divine reign of God took on flesh when Jesus entered the world, Jesus is the

embodiment of the Kingdom of God, and He inaugurated God's Kingdom on earth. While the religious leaders were looking for a future Kingdom for Israel, Jesus preached that the Kingdom of God is here. The reign of God on earth has begun, and all are welcome.

Everything Jesus did reflected, manifested, embodied, and affirmed the Kingdom of God's reign

Jesus said his mission was to preach the Good News of the Kingdom (God's reign). Jesus' teachings were about the ethics of the Kingdom. The miracles of Jesus were manifestations of Kingdom power over nature, sickness, disease, hunger, and brokenness of humanity. Jesus demonstrated Kingdom authority over evil. His death and resurrection revealed Kingdom power over death and sin. His ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit sealed and confirmed Kingdom authority. The Kingdom of God is wherever God's reign and rule is at work. It was embodied in Jesus, as the fulfillment of God's master plan to inaugurate God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

"Thy Will be done on earth, as it is in heaven?" reflects a theology known as "already and not yet"

Jesus established and launched the Kingdom of God on earth, but there is still a future fulfillment when Christ will return and complete what he began. Jesus got things started, breaking the power of sin and death, and enabling the power of the Holy Spirit to come to us personally. The world is still a mess. God's perfect rule and reign is not complete. Jesus said the Kingdom of God is here! The Kingdom reign is now, and also the Kingdom reign fulfillment is coming.

As we walk and follow God's Will in our lives, we bring the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

As dwellers in the Kingdom of God, we are seeking the Kingdom of God and following God's will and ways. Jesus brought the Kingdom of God down with him through his life on earth, but we are still preparing a space for it among us. The fullness of God's Kingdom reign is yet to come. In the meantime, God's Kingdom is continuing to expand, advance, and grow through us as we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us. Through the Holy Spirit, Kingdom of Heaven is within every believer. Paul talks about us reigning with Christ. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, the presence of God is within every believer.

As agents of the Kingdom of God to a broken and hurting world, we are manifesting and advancing God's reign wherever we go. This is to be our top priority, mission, and focus, just as it was for Jesus. Our church theme for this year is "On Mission for the Kingdom."

As Kingdom dwellers and Kingdom agents, we must intentionally seek the Kingdom of God

As Kingdom dwellers that live under the reign of God, we seek to live in God's will and ways. As Kingdom dwellers, we look inward. As Kingdom agents, we look outward. Living in the Kingdom of God, under the rule and reign of God, requires congruency of our inner life and outer practices. So often, we go through life without really thinking about what we say and what we do. We may have moments when we are serving God or spending time with God. But so much of our life is routine without any intentional thought. What if we increased our consciousness to pay closer attention in seeking even more ways to advance the Kingdom of God in our daily lives both inward and outward facing?

In intentional Kingdom living, we pause to consider these questions

- Is there a biblical truth or principle that applies to this situation?
- What is the most loving thing to do in this moment?
- What would Jesus do in this circumstance?
- What does the Spirit of God seem to be suggesting right now?
- How might God be represented or glorified in this matter?

The more we ponder these questions in our day to day lives, the more we will find ourselves, as Kingdom dwellers and Kingdom agents, living into the prayer, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven!”

The values of the Kingdom of God are opposite from the values of the world

God’s will and God’s ways are often upside down from the world. The Beatitudes make plain how much the Kingdom of God perspective is opposite from the world’s perspective.

Jesus preached: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3-10). Each of the conditions or positions Jesus mentions would not be considered favorable or positive by the world’s standards. They are favored in the Kingdom of God. As we seek to be Kingdom dwellers and Kingdom agents, we will not fit with this world; we will be going against the norm.

For example, the Kingdom says seek to serve, because the last will be first; the world says look out for number one and have others serve you. The Kingdom says give and you will receive; the world says receive first and give what is left over. The Kingdom says love your enemies and those who persecute you; the world says get your enemies before they get you. The Kingdom says don’t worry about food, drink, or clothes because your Father will provide; the world says accumulate all you can, for you can only trust yourself. Since we are living in an upside down world, praying the prayer Jesus taught us is so important. We are fighting against the Kingdom of this world.

Living into the prayer, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven”

We are living into the prayer as we live the upside-down values of the Kingdom and extend those values to a broken world. We are living into the prayer as we follow in Jesus’ footsteps and seek to fulfill his mission “to bring Good News to the poor ...to proclaim captives be released, to help the blind to see, and...to set the oppressed free in all its literal and metaphorical forms (Luke 4:18). We are living into this prayer every time we live into the words, “to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8).

God, through the Holy Spirit, uses us to answer this prayer. The Holy Spirit guides us, leads us, and draws us closer to God. Through our worship, witness, and works in the world, God invites us into partnership in answering this prayer, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

You are invited to draw closer to God through our 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting that begins next Sunday. Consider making this a time to connect with God afresh as we begin a new year. Listen for what God, as your King, wants to share with you as you seek God’s Will and God’s Ways. Consider how God may be inviting you to be on mission for God’s Kingdom.

The world is hungry for the Kingdom of God, even if the world does not know it. They are hungry for peace, grace, mercy, joy, forgiveness, purpose, and the unconditional love that is only found in the Kingdom of God. All are invited.

So let us continue to pray, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” We pray for our own lives as Kingdom dwellers, and for this world as Kingdom agents. Let us continue to pray until that time when God’s Kingdom is fulfilled, when heaven and earth are once again united under God’s reign, and all of heaven and earth will sing - “How Great is our God.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDING FOR USE IN FAMILY GROUPS

Sermon Preamble

-What are the benefits of physical gestures, such as a body prayer, in reciting the Lord's Prayer or singing worship songs, for communicating to yourself and others the real meaning rather than simply saying the words? How has bodily gestures helped you?

The "Your Kingdom Come" idea can be difficult for us

-What images arise for you from the idea of a kingdom? In what ways are these kingdom images not helpful in understanding the meaning of the Kingdom of God?

The Good News of the Kingdom of God is the everlasting core message of Jesus

-What is your reaction to the statement that the core message of Jesus is the Good News of the Kingdom of God or its synonym, the Kingdom of Heaven? Why?

Throughout the gospel accounts, Jesus is consistently talking about the Kingdom of God.

-Jesus used parables to explain the Kingdom of God. Which of the following parables was most helpful to you in understanding the meaning of the Kingdom of God: Yeast and mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-33), Treasure and pearl (Matthew 13:44-47), A king who gave a banquet (Matthew 22:2)? Why?

The Kingdom of God means the reign, rule, and sovereignty of God, not a place

-Why is it significant that the Kingdom of God means the non-material realm of the reign and rule of God, not a place that is coming? In what ways has the reign and rule of God been reinstituted by Jesus?

The Sovereignty of God is from power to love and nurture with freedom inaugurated by Jesus

-In what ways does the sovereignty of God affirm God's true power that freely loves, enables, and nurtures? In what ways is the sovereignty of God towards the reign and rule of God opposite to a dictator or king that threatens our freedom?

Everything Jesus did reflected, manifested, embodied, and affirmed the Kingdom of God's reign

-What actions of Jesus reflected, embodied, and affirmed God's masterplan to inaugurate God's Kingdom reign on earth as it is in heaven?

"Thy Will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" reflects a theology known as "already and not yet"

-What is the meaning to you of the theology that the Kingdom of God is "already and not yet?"

As we walk and follow God's Will in our lives, we bring the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

-With the Holy Spirit guiding us, in what ways do we manifest and advance God's reign wherever we go in this broken and hurting world?

As Kingdom dwellers and Kingdom agents, we must intentionally seek the Kingdom of God

-What are some intentional spiritual techniques, questions to ponder, and ways to live our lives both inward and outward facing that are most meaningful to you?

The values of the Kingdom of God are opposite from the values of the world

-What aspects of God's Will and God's Ways are opposite from a worldly perspective? Which of the conditions or positions mentioned by Jesus in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10) favored by the Kingdom of God resonate with you as opposite to the worldly perspective? Why?

Living into the prayer, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven"

-For living application to our lives, in what ways will you live into the prayer, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven?" How will you live it into your own life as Kingdom dwellers? How will you live it for this world as Kingdom agents?